DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 169 014 SP 014 009

AUTHOR Brown, Carlton E.
TITLE Needs Assessment: Determining Project Goals and Establishing the Change Relationship.
INSTITUTION New Hampshire Univ., Durham.; Portsmouth Public Schools, N.H.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Teacher Corps.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Agents; *Change Strategies; *Conflict Resolution; Decision Making; Evaluation Methods; Helping Relationship; *Needs Assessment; Problem Solving; *Teacher Administrator Relationship

ABSTRACT

The basic problems faced by those implementing a project of assessing school needs and initiating change are discussed. An example of a teacher corps project funded for such an endeavor is summarized. How the initial problems of assessing needs to determine project goals and establishing a credible change relationship with school personnel were handled is described. Emphasis was placed on giving teachers the power and training to determine the focus methods for the two larger parts of the assessment program: needs of teachers and students. To this end, members of the staff received training in needs assessment and design. The importance of resolving conflict between staff and administration, of establishing trusting relationships between the agents of change, and of sharing the decision making process is emphasized throughout this report. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED169014

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Carlton E. Brown

Program Development Specialist

NEEDS ASSESSMENT: DETERMINING PROJECT GOALS AND ESTABLISHING THE CHANGE RELATIONSHIP

UNH/Portsmouth Teacher Corps Project

SP 014 009

NEEDS ASSESSMENT: DETERMINING PROJECT GOALS AND ESTABLISHING THE CHANGE RELATIONSHIP

Every inservice/school change project faces two initial problems among others: (1) assessing needs to determine project goals and (2) establishing a credible change relationship with school personnel. When a new project enters a school with new personnel and decides to assess school needs and design change programs, staff response usually ranges from concern to mild fear to outright reactionary rejection. At the same time, the immediate successes of any inservice/school change project is more dependent on the establishment of credibility with the school staff than on establishing the worth of an innovation or direction of change; and the long-term successes depend to a large degree on the accuracy of publicly determined needs to be met. How these critical issues are resolved has determined the fate of many inservice/school change projects.

The Problem Stated

The UNH/Portsmouth Teacher Corps Project entered a junior high school that had never had any kind of special federally-funded project in its history and which had undergone radical organizational change in the two years prior to the entrance of the project. A new principal had reorganized an 850 student junior high school from a traditional departmental organization to a school-within-a-school format. The staff was in a state of reaction to the new principal's administrative style and voted for the project proposal because the principal wanted it and because they did not believe it would be funded. In addition, part of the initial needs assessment for the proposal included some multicultural education issues named by the Black community, a concept that the teachers had some negative views about. The staff displayed many

of these uncertainties in their first interactions with project personnel.

Needs Assessment Design

The needs assessment design was originally planned to examine the schooling needs of each major clientele - teachers, administrators, students, parents, and the community in general. Within these major client categories were named some sub-categories - minority parents, special services teachers, special education students. In addition to assessing the needs of client groups, the needs assessment was designed to carry out a curriculum and an organizational assessment. From each of these individual assessments and composite data analyses, data profiles were to be created: teacher, student, parent, and administrator profiles were to be developed to accompany organizational and curricular profiles. The details of these profiles, inter-profile correlations and contradictions would be transformed into need statements in several categories - student needs, teacher needs, community needs or concerns, organizational needs, curricular needs. These would then be prioritized according to the evident strength derived from the needs assessment. Those needs that did not automatically fall under areas of Teacher Corps initiation were to be referred to the appropriate agency within the school or school system. The top several priorities, with special consideration for special areas with smaller client groups (reading, special education, minority communities, etc.) were then to be affirmed as the primary inservice agenda for the project. The needs assessment process is graphically displayed in Appendix A along with an outline of the kinds of specific data sought through the process.

The Resolve

The project staff designed a needs assessment process that gave teachers the power and training to determine the focus methods for the two larger parts of the needs assessment: student and school staff needs assessment. It was decided that the assessment of teacher and student needs would be conducted by

a needs assessment Task Group who would receive graduate instruction in needs assessment design and instrument construction in the process. A course carrying graduate credit was developed and approved by the University.

Twenty-four teachers of a staff of 56 registered for the course. This group included teachers from each academic and special area departments, the Title I coordinator, Special Education teacher, the Teachers' Association building representative, two counselors, and the principal and assistant principal.

The Needs Assessment Process

The first class session was denoted to instruction in the processes and purposes of needs assessment and an exploration of issues that might be addressed through needs assessment. The second session consisted of a continuation of exploration of needs assessment issues. Between the first and second class sessions, several teachers privately raised concerns with the author (course instructor) about the principal's administrative style that did not surface in the second session.

Between the second and third class sessions, the author spoke to the principal about the issues raised privately by teachers and stressed the need for openness and autonomy within the group to assure relevance and accuracy for the needs assessment. An agreement was reached that allowed the author to open the third class session with a statement about necessity of openness, honesty, and autonomy in the Task Group. This statement was supported by assurances from the principal. The third session then proceeded to develop a final list of needs assessment issues that included concerns about both administrative style and change.

The fourth session began with instruction in a process for prioritizing issues and developing instrumentation from the lists of needs and concern

issues raised. The group was then divided equally by areas of school representation to develop a teacher needs assessment instrument and a student questionnaire. The instructor interacted with each group to answer questions concerning possible types of instruments, types of response scales, size of instruments, administering instruments, wording, expected results, and other technical questions.

The remaining sessions involved developing the two instruments, cross-checking between the groups, field-testing the student questionnaire, administering both instruments, and developing preliminary reports of results. In addition, two activities were carried out with the teachers to examine parts or aspects of the organization. The first of these was an "Opinion Leadership Exercise" to provide some data about the informal organization. The second of these activities was a discussive exploration of tension points between the school's departmental organization and its interdisciplinary teaming.

Parts of the needs assessment design were never completed because the development of the two instruments involved much more time than anticipated. Specifically, curricular needs analyses were not conducted to determine the types of curricula that were in operation, to assess the multicultural character of the curriculum, to examine and catalogue the nature of materials, and to examine and catalogue teaching styles and approaches; more detailed organizational assessments were not conducted to develop a clearer profile of organizational patterns and tensions, informal patterns, slippage, and decision-making characteristics.

The author informally gathered data in these several categories through informal observations throughout the school(including classrooms, counseling and administrative offices) and through informal conversations and interviews with several members of the school staff.

The community needs assessment was conducted by the project's Community

Coordinator with the assistance of the author. A mail-out questionnaire was used, but the return was less than five percent. Additional community related data was obtained through records of advisory council meetings and meetings of the Equal Educational Opportunities Committee.

Finally, the author conducted a state, school system, and site school document analysis using the principal's files, teacher and student handbooks, state education laws and regulations, and school board policy files.

Findings

Several issues arise when a needs assessment is conducted in the manner we have described. As needs assessment qua needs assessment, we admit that the technical quality of our effort could have been better if designed solely by the expert. However, as needs assessment exists in the process of developing and implementing a two-year inservice education/school change project, there were clearly larger issues at stake. Based on personnel experience and the results of much thought, evaluation, and research by ourselves and others, we believed that an inservice project such as Teacher Corps necessarily needed to transfer the feeling of ownership to the client populations and needed to establish a "change relationship" with these same clients with components of open communication, trust, honesty, and collegial feelings, including a helper-helpee relationship. We also needed to have the school staff "own" the results of the assessment. This approach to conducting needs assessment accomplished these project needs fairly immediately.

The needs assessment was, however, of sufficient quality that the project staff could rely on the results in conjunction with the informal data gathered. The four dominant needs that emerged from the assessment were (1) instruction and assistance in individualizing curriculum given the school's policy of heterogeneous grouping, (2) assistance in handling reading problems in content

areas, (3) facilitation of mainstreaming mandates, and (4) increasing professional autonomy and responsibility in developing and implementing curricular programs and approaches.

Meeting the needs specified in items #1 and #3 above, plus facilitating a new administrative organization and administrative style by the principal are the primary successes achieved through the project.

Finally, what was not accomplished during the time period allotted to needs assessment was accomplished within the following six months. For example, an Organizational Assessment Index was administered in the Spring of the first year of the project with the assistance of a needs assessment and Evaluation Leadership Team composed of teachers and the assistant principal. The data obtained through this instrument was then used extensively by the principal and his new administrative team of four school coordinators.

Needs Assessment and Evaluation

The example in the final paragraph of the prior section also displays our view of the relationships between needs assessment and evaluation. We view them as one process that is continuous. The difference is in the uses of data at any specific instance - to determine what should be done (needs assessment) or to determine what happened, what we did, what went wrong, or what is happening (evaluation).

In addition, evaluation was treated both formally and informally in the same manner as in initial needs assessment. Formal evaluation was used to determine the level of use and teacher views of an inservice effort as well as determining what next steps should be taken. Informal evaluation is the arena in which problems are raised before crises develop, where detailed feedback is collected to more accurately tailor inservice efforts, and where needs related to or facilitative of an inservice effort are surfaced.

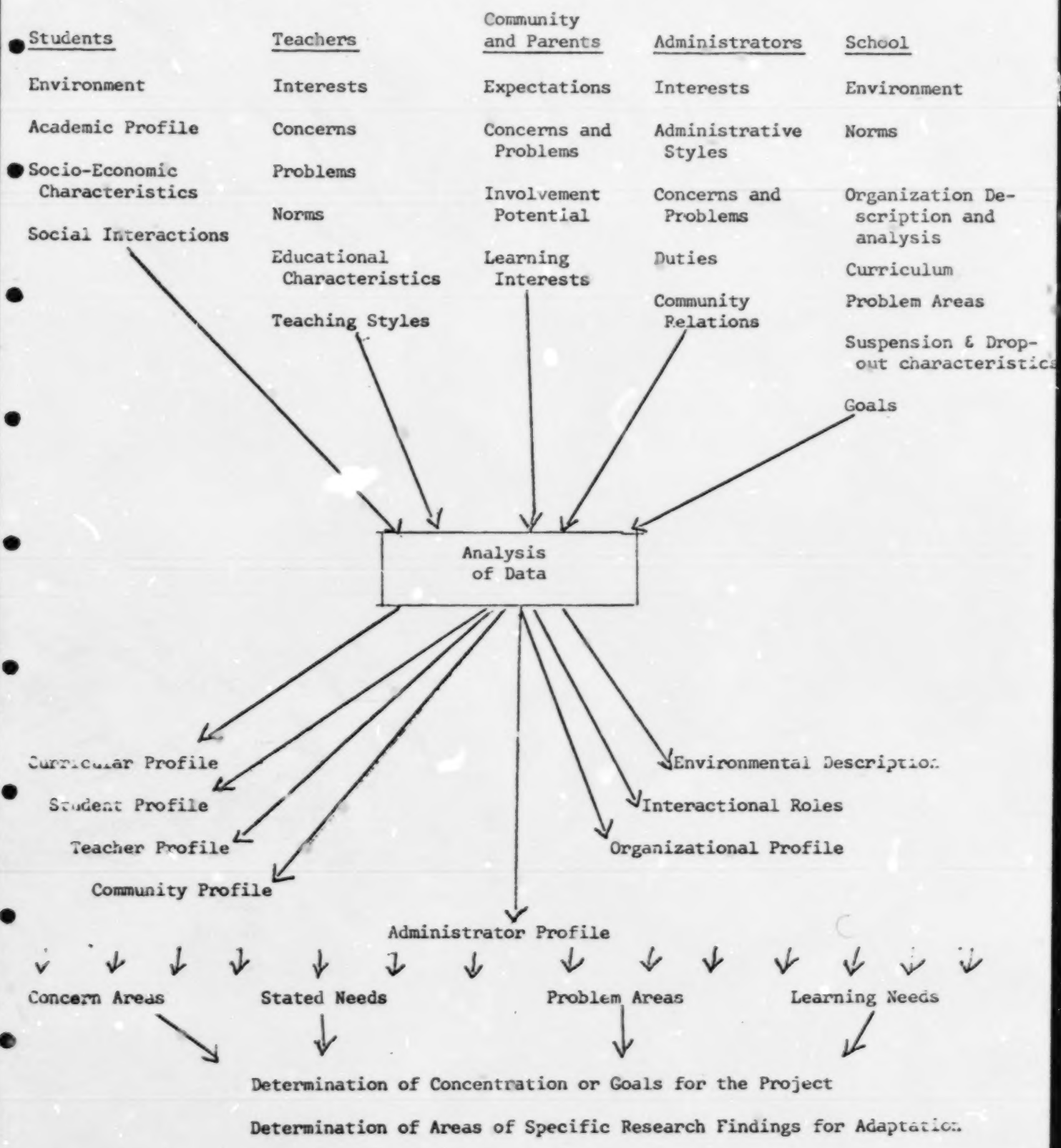
Conclusion

What has been described in the previous pages can be called an "ad hoc" approach to the development and implementation of inservice/school change efforts. What this means is that we have found that a useful approach to inservice education and school change is the preparation of project staff (1) to be predisposed to the probability of necessary and often drastic, non-systematic changes in the process of attempting to reach goals, (2) to cease to be married to particular methods and approaches to reach goals and to accept almost any method or approach that can be part of an incremental, often disjointed approach to the project's goals, and (3) to learn to develop relationships with clients that include trust and collegiality along with helper roles and those of question-raiser, challenger, open communicator, and a professional concerned about the welfare of parents, students, and teachers.

Developing an appropriate conglomerate of these roles requires that project staff members have several personal and professional characteristics: (1) risk-taking, (2) ability to live comfortably with ambiguity and uncertainty, (3) ability to cope with occasional abuse, (4) knowledge of the organizational and cultural operation of schools, (5) a clear understanding of project goals, and (6) a clear understanding of educational change processes and the ability to manipulate those processes.

APPENDIX A

NEEDS ASSESSMENT DESIGN



DESCRIPTIONS OF DATA ORGANIZATION CATEGORIES

Curricular Profile--The curricular profile will describe the content of the various subject areas, departmental concentrations, team emphases, goals and objectives. This profile will contain an assessment of the generalized curricular processes utilized by departments and teams, grade-level articulation, race and sex bias and other elements determined by Task Force participants.

Student Profile--The student profile will describe the student body along general dimensions: socio-economic position, school-wide achievement, test scores, transience, racial/cultural diversity, social interaction, learning styles, areas of critical need and other areas as determined by the needs assessment Task Force.

Teacher Profile--The teacher profile will catalog the teachers' self-assessed needs, their views of school problems, their level of educational attainment, period of service and status in the system, teaching styles, peer interactions, in-service education, history, degree and kind of community involvement, group norms, desire for involvement, observed problems and other areas determined by the needs assessment Task Force.

Community Profile - The community profile will describe the socio-economic characteristic of the community and sub-committees served by the school, degree and kinds of community and parent interactions and involvements with the school, their views of school successes and problems, parent expectations of the school, their personal learning interests and their potential for involvement in project activities.

Administrator Profile-- The administrator profile will describe the duties and responsibilities of each administrator in the school, their interactional and working styles, their views of school and individual role needs, their views of school successes and problem areas, degree and kind of involvement with

parents and the community and their inservice interests and potentials for involvement.

Organizational Profile--The organizational profile will describe the organization of the school as an institutional system. The various parts and sub-parts of the school will be described and their interrelations specified. Inter-role relationships (students, teachers, counselors, administrators) will also be specified. Observational and analytically derived conclusions will be stated concerning the benefits and problems of the organizational format, along with benefits and problems as perceived by school personnel, parents and students.

Interactional Roles--The modes of inter- and intra-role interaction involving teachers, administrators, counselors, students and parents will be specified.

Environmental Description-- The environmental description will delineate the impressions of the human environment of the school derived from needs assessment instrumentation and observation. Critical areas of success and problem areas will be specified and linked to potential causation.

Needs Assessment Task Group

Rationale

The idea of a needs assessment Task Group grows from the Leadership Team Concept outlined in the proposal. Basically, the needs assessment Task Group will guide and assist the Program Development Specialist in designing and conducting the initial needs assessment and analyzing and disseminating the findings. The Task Group will also be provided learning experiences in needs assessment including the study of needs assessment models and instruments, the design of instruments, data collection methodologies and data analysis procedures. This may provide the school with staff members who are capable of continuing to carry out some school-wide needs assessment activities after the project is terminated.

The major benefit of the Task Force will be in the development of a needs assessment plan responsive to the characteristics and constraints of the school and its staff.

In addition, the needs assessment will be largely teacher-directed and may receive wider acceptance than if it were not.

Program

1 - The needs assessment Task Force will be in operation from the third week in September until the needs assessment has been completed.

2 - The needs assessment Task Force will study and evaluate a selection of needs assessment models, including that developed by the Program Development Specialist.

3 - The NA Task Force will study and evaluate a diverse selection of assessment instruments and methodologies.

4 - The NA Task Force will develop with the PDS a needs assessment design appropriate for the school and that meets the criteria of comprehensiveness.

5 - The NA Task Force will develop and implement with the PDS the instruments and procedures necessary to meet the design requirements.

6 - The NA Task Force will assist the PDS, advisory council and policy committee in analyzing and summarizing the data collected in the needs assessment.

7 - The NA Task Force with the PDS will develop needs statements, environmental and institutional descriptions from the data and the results of the data analysis.

8 - The NA Task Force will attempt to derive a simplified, continuous NA design from this initial needs assessment for ongoing use by the project and potential use by the school after project termination.

Crediting

The PDS will meet with the Task Force at scheduled intervals as the needs assessment requires it. Members will earn two or three graduate credits, depending on their level of involvement. The PDS will monitor contact hours and keep members of the Task Force informed of their progress.